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# DIABETES CLOSE UP

Its All Connected

January 2009 • No. 87

## In the News: DPS Health's Virtual Lifestyle Management Software

Dr. Kathleen McTigue, University of Pittsburgh researcher, internist and co-developer of the Virtual Lifestyle Management (VLM) service, presented a live demonstration of the VLM at the recent Diabetes Technology Society meeting. The VLM is an online program that helps people at risk for or with type 2 diabetes set weight-loss goals, design a specific lifestyle plan, and then achieve results. The University of Pittsburgh worked with DPS Health to create the program based on the lifestyle regimen used in the Diabetes Prevention Program (published in 2002) that was created by the University under a grant from the NIH. Studies of the VLM software have demonstrated remarkable weight-loss efficacy—38% of users lost more than 7% of their weight after 9 months. The program is designed to be hosted and managed by a healthcare provider or company as a service for its patients or employees to help them lose weight and improve metabolic outcomes. From what we've seen, this program looks very positive, both in terms of improving participants' health and potentially helping to control the costs of overseeing lifestyle support programs. We think the system may appeal to a broad range of organizations as it provides an opportunity for substantial health improvements (and reduced costs!) with a minimum of additional training or manpower.

- **The program is a one-year intensive weight loss tool composed of a number of different online components that users engage in parallel.** First, there are a series of lessons to help users learn about ways to lose weight. The program includes 16 weekly lessons and eight monthly lessons to engage users in learning about healthy habits throughout the entire course of the program. The second aspect is a behavior tracking and planning tool that helps users to design and follow a regimen of regular physical activity and healthy eating habits. Users can schedule an activity plan using a drag-and-drop graphical interface and view graphs of trends in their weight, food consumption, and 'step count' from exercise that users measure using an accelerometer. Users can also set diet and physical activity goals, and the program automatically adjusts those goals based on their activities. Finally, the communications aspect of the program lets users send and receive secure

messages with a coach (always a healthcare professional) at the institution hosting the program and attend moderated group chat sessions with other users.

- **From the healthcare professional or coach side, the VLM service includes tools to monitor users' progress.** Coaches can send secure personalized updates to each user based on the patient's specific performance. The coach can view individual progress or generate group reports about a specific population of users taken together, and can send users individualized tips or answers to specific questions.
  
- **Studies of the VLM have demonstrated remarkable weight-loss efficacy.** An abstract published by McTigue et al. in the March 2008 supplement to the Journal of General Internal Medicine reported 9-month data from 50 patients showing average weight loss of 5.53 kg from a mean BMI of 36.8. By the end of the study, 34 users who had weight data in the 9-month window had weight loss of 7.13 kg, and 38% of those users had achieved >7% weight loss. Fat consumption had decreased by 8.4 grams/day and step count had increased by 1538 steps/day after 6 months of use. Twelve month data will be available in the near future.
  
- **The VLM program is intended as a service hosted by a healthcare provider, group of providers, or other entity and made available online to its patients or employees.** DPS Health ([www.dpshealth.com/vlm](http://www.dpshealth.com/vlm)) has been granted a license to bring the Virtual Lifestyle Management service to healthcare provider organizations. Many different organizations have begun to take advantage of the VLM, including the Air Force, the Motion Picture and Television Fund (a healthcare provider), the USC General Internal Medicine practice, Mental Health America, the Government Employees Hospital Association of Kansas City (a health plan), and Monarch Healthcare (a physician group in Southern California).

— By Brendan Milliner

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